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18. — *The Life of Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts.* By his Son, EDMUND QUINCY. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1867. pp. xii., 560.

THE verdict of the public as to the interest of this volume has been so unanimous that we need do no more than say that, for once, the public is altogether right in its judgment. It is as interesting a biography of an American as was ever written; and, while the subject of it was in all ways a remarkable man, the taste and judgment of the biographer have enabled him not to obscure that fact in the reader's mind, as has been done before now, in other cases, by unwieldy pens. If Mr. Edmund Quincy may well be proud of such a father, he may also feel a just satisfaction in having so admirably discharged all that was possible of the debt he owed to his example and memory.

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19. — *The First Canticle (Inferno) of the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri.* Translated by THOMAS WILLIAM PARSONS. Boston: DeVries, Ibarra, & Co. 1867. pp. 216.

THE name of Dr. Parsons is familiar and dear as a poet to that limited number of his countrymen who have refined perceptions and a cultivated taste. His audience has not been so large as he deserved, not so large, perhaps, as those who appreciate him would have expected; but the quality of applause more than makes up for any lack of vociferation. Competent judges know him as a master of that classical English which culminated in Dryden, of that polished finish which had its last great example in Gray. Perhaps it will be luckier for him hereafter than it is now, that he has not been led astray from style into mannerism by any fashion of the day. His best poems have naturalness of thought, a grace of sentiment, and purity of diction truly Horatian, — qualities sure of general acknowledgment sooner or later. We could name a dozen of them not surpassed in their kind by those of any contemporary. His poetry has the distinguished merit of not seeking for originality by overstepping simplicity, outside of whose limits it is never to be found in the marvellous perfection of its unexpectedness.

It is now twenty-five years since Dr. Parsons published ten Cantos of the Inferno, as a herald and specimen of his translation. He has in the mean while labored at the correction and revision of it with all the diligence of affection. He has chosen for his measure the pentameter quatrain of alternate rhymes, familiarized to all English ears by the famous Elegy of Gray. Davies and Davenant had already shown that

it might be successfully employed at greater length, the one in didactic, the other in epic poetry. Dr. Parsons, by an adroit interlacing of stanzas one with the other, and by an artistic distribution of the pauses elsewhere than at the end of the quatrain, has given to the measure all that it needed for his purpose both of continuity and variety. Davenant sometimes runs one stanza over into the next, but seldom, and apparently from necessity rather than with design. Commonly each stanza is a separate whole, and Gray's poem is a succession of epigrams (in the old sense) each perfect in itself and only connected by the general sentiment. In many cases the order might be changed without detriment either to the continuity of the thought or to the general effect. By Dr. Parsons's device, he cunningly contrives to give something of the effect of *terza rima*, while escaping its difficulty. We shall not enter upon the vexed question of rhyme and blank verse. The kind of fidelity attainable by each is different from that of the other, though it is not always safe to define this difference absolutely, as if it were inherent by the nature of the case, for surely blank verse is as capable of wings, as rhyme liable to jog wearily afoot. The latter, however, in artistic hands, seems to shoe the feet of verse with *taluria*, and surely is worth trying in the translation of a rhymed poem a part of whose peculiar quality lies in the form of its verse. The attempt has been several times made in English to translate Dante in this way, sometimes in *terza rima*, sometimes, as Dr. Parsons has done, with the semblance of it. But it has never before been made by a poet, and therefore never before with anything like the success of the translation before us. The great snare of rhyme for the translator is that it obliges him (what Dante boasted that no word had ever made him do) to say rather what he must than what he would. Some of Dr. Parsons's verses have suffered a little by being caught in this trap, though he has generally avoided it with consummate skill, and where he is best rises easily to the level of his theme. Where Dante is at his height, his translator kindles with a fire and attains a force that give his lines all the charm of original production, and we read real *poetry*, such as speaks the same meaning in all tongues. The most ungrateful part of his task is now done, and we look forward with an interest as keen as it was a quarter of a century ago, and with a confidence based on sure ground, to see him shake out his sails on the *miglior acqua* of the Purgatorio and Paradiso. His translation should be welcomed by all who are interested in native genius and scholarship, not as the rival of Longfellow's, but as a *succedaneum* to it.